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ABSTRACT

The history of the community college is a source of pride and satisfaction for those who have been involved in the movement. Among their past achievements community colleges can count their role in democratizing higher education, opening the door to economic improvement, facilitating the social assimilation of immigrant groups, and giving visibility and dignity to career education and to the world of work. If community colleges are to become institutions for the future, several changes will be required. Community colleges must not only respond and adapt to societal change, but take the initiative to bring about needed changes. They must live up to their reputations as teaching institutions without losing contact with relevant research. Intellectual integrity also must be on the agenda for the future, so that community colleges can be confident about the quality of their work, particularly when competing with universities. In addition, the future requires maintaining important philosophical and practical characteristics, including open access, personal attention and service, and responsiveness to the community. The choice between whether community colleges will be institutions of the past or colleges for the future rests in the hands of those who are a part of community colleges today. (EJV)

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Community Colleges:

Institutions of the Past

or For the Future?

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Remarks delivered to the 36th Annual Convention
of the
Florida Association of Community Colleges

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"COMMUNITY COLLEGES:
INSTITUTIONS OF THE PAST OR FOR THE FUTURE?"*

The planners of this program leave no room to equivocate. They have posed for us a straightforward question. Are community colleges of America to remain as institutions of the past or will they become institutions for the future?

We can look to the community colleges past with a great deal of pride and satisfaction. Some of us are fortunate enough to have been involved in the community college movement for a quarter of a century or more. We have experienced the tremendous growth period that has been its hallmark. This growth in itself was not of great significance. The reasons which brought it about, and the way the institutions have responded, are very significant. Our community college growth has been due in part to the ability to accommodate a great democratizing movement in higher education. Community colleges have been the means by which hundreds of thousands of Americans have moved into higher levels of education and upward in the economic system.

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*Remarks delivered by Joe B. Rushing, Chancellor, Tarrant County Junior College, to the 36th Annual Convention of the Florida Association of Community Colleges, November 8, 1985.

Sociologically, they have made a tremendous impact. Minority groups throughout the Nation have had their first access to the system through community colleges. A great host of new Americans - immigrants from throughout the world - have found community colleges to be the door to economic improvement and social assimilation.

In addition to growth in numbers, community colleges have responded with programs giving visibility and dignity to career education and to the world of work. They have accomplished this while at the same time offering academic studies to those people who wish to move on to higher degrees and into various professions. This balanced marriage of the academic and vocational, theoretical and practical, may be one of their greatest contributions in the last four decades.

Community college files are jammed with success stories: The high school dropout who becomes a respected physician; the middle-aged female who makes successful reentry into the work force; graduates who compete successfully in professional fields; the list is endless in length and variety.

This is the impressive past. Is it good enough? Yes, good enough for the past, but NOT good enough for the future. If community colleges are to be institutions of the future, there are several things required of them and of those who shape their philosophy, purposes, and programs. Allow me to enumerate a few.

First they must be institutions of change. The commitment to change will insure that they will be responsive to changes in society brought about by other forces. Adaptability is essential. Moreover, community colleges for the future, if they are indeed that, will move on their own initiative to bring about change by other forces. This ability to adapt is the key.

Few in this audience are old enough to have studied with the great Newton Edwards, Professor of History at the University of Chicago. I can see his trademarks now, the snow white hair, and the curved stemmed pipe clinched between his teeth as he paced back and forth in front of the classroom. (Today we would not tolerate the pipe!) I remember his removing the pipe from his mouth, pointing the stem at his class and saying, "An institution that can not adapt itself to a changing social order will disappear." I believed Dr. Edwards then, and I believe him now. While the institution of the community college may not disappear as a visible entity, it could disappear as a viable educational force if it can not change. Community colleges had their start because the universities of the Nineteenth Century could not adapt to an open society nor accommodate the growth in numbers in the Twentieth Century. Let us not be the victims of the same inflexibility which resulted in our origins.

Secondly, community colleges, if they are indeed

to be institutions of the future, must live up to their press notices. They have been called "teaching institutions", terminology we have coined to extol our ability to bring about effective learning. By both implication and outright statements, we have claimed to be better at this than the university. Often this point has been emphasized by disclaiming our role as "research institutions" and by lauding the fact that we do not use graduate students to do large parts of our teaching. These arguments may return to haunt us in the future. As to research, we have overplayed the tune. In our efforts to depict our colleges as being free from this research mentality, and as we have expressed contempt for "publish or perish" policies, we have failed to do the kinds of research needed to support the validity of our claims. We deplore the practice of using doctoral students to teach under-graduates in universities. (A practice, incidentally, which many of us have at one time been participants!) I sometimes have the uncomfortable feeling that many community colleges might be enlivened by having a few such faculty members who are engaged in, and excited about, their own research.

Let's not belabor that old issue but look instead at a third. Community colleges, to be institutions of the future, must establish reputations for intellectual integrity. There is a new mood across the land. A few years ago, the public's attention was directed to taxation,

the source of support. Now it focuses on what and how we teach. I can not tell Floridians about that. In my own state, the governor has recently appointed a Select Committee on Higher Education. Over the next 18 months, this committee will be prying into every aspect of higher education to bring recommendations before the Texas Legislature. Some of their findings will result in improvement in the system. Others are likely to place community colleges on the defensive. Already investigation is being made of developmental education, student retention, repeating of courses and other factors associated most often with the forty-nine community colleges in the state.

The community college reputation for intellectual integrity will be coming under closer scrutiny by another group - our colleagues in the universities. In the 1960's, community colleges served as "safety valves," allowing the universities to raise admission standards, drop associate degree programs and control enrollment. Now, as many areas of the county have a diminishing supply of students we suddenly become competitors, and they, the universities, will not let us forget it. We are likely in for a period of odious comparisons between community colleges and universities which we have not faced before. We can be confident about the <u>quality</u> of our work as compared to other institutions, but unfortunately, <u>quality</u> is likely to be measured against "standards" established by the traditionalists.

I could continue at great length enumerating problems faced by community colleges as they strive to remain viable

and effective educational institutions for the future. But time does not permit an exhaustive cataloging. What is important is that these and other issues be resolved while at the same time, maintaining important philosophical and practical characteristics which made community colleges successful in the first place.

Preeminent among these is open access. We can not solve our problems by attempting to eliminate them at the admissions desk. An educational system which denies opportunity is of the distant past, not the future.

Second, personal attention and personal service to students must remain an integral part of the total college program. We follow every Associate in Arts graduate for three years after they leave Tarrant County Junior College. In general, their responses are very positive. A common thread runs through all of these studies. Former students state repeatedly, "The faculty at TCJC cared about me." That, Ladies and Gentlemen, may be the highest praise that we can get from those who have been through our institutions.

Another quality which we must maintain, if we maintain the community college as the institution of the future, is a responsiveness to the community we serve. Institutional philosophy and mission will determine to a great extent what the community will be. For the Tarrant County Junior College, we see our primary service area as being a 900 square-mile tract in North Central Texas. Other community colleges have state-wide responsibilities. For some of you, international education is of great importance.

Our responsiveness must be to the business and professional community, the handicapped, able learners, educationally deprived, ethnic groups, youth, the elderly and to every segment of the society we serve.

The mission, if clearly defined, causes me no great anxiety even if it differs from that of my own college. What does evoke a troubling thought is our constant effort to "establish" ourselves, to make our tasks easier. Our contracts become more restrictive. Our catalogs grow in volume. Our policy and procedure manuals begin to resemble a city telephone directory. As this trend continues, our ability to respond is diminished.

In closing, there is another pressure to be resisted if our colleges are to be the institutions for the future. The community college must not price people out of education. This is probably the most precarious threat. Already under pressure from general economic conditions and state fiscal policies, community colleges have been forced to seek more of their revenue from the students they serve. Texas, long at the bottom of the tuition ladder, has recently increased tuition at the State universities. In one of its wiser decisions the legislature left to the local community college board the responsibility for setting tuition. We doubled our tuition from $4 per semester hour to $8, but it is our goal to continue to make education accessible to all our constituents regardless of economic conditions.

COMMUNITY COLLEGES: Institutions of the past or of the future? The answer rests in <u>neither past nor future</u> but in the

present. The responsibility for the answer is with those of us who are a part of community colleges today.

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